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ABSTRACT

This performance report describes activities and accomplishments of the second year of a federally supported project to expand and enhance training for special education teachers at Louisiana State University (Shreveport). Major accomplishments reported include: presentations made at 5 high schools and program participation by 77 students, either undergraduate, in the alternative certification program, or post-graduate. Specific accomplishments are listed under each of the project's five objectives: (1) to enhance optimal vocational potential by improving academic performance; (2) to enable special education students to better manage their lives and careers; (3) to provide career information and advisement to special education students; and (4) to provide financial assistance, especially to students in the Alternative Certification Academy. Further sections of the report address: project design, selection of participants, project goals, and the evaluation design. Results of interviews with 10 summer session participants are summarized and development of a questionnaire is outlined. Questionnaire responses and a focus group session are analyzed. Ten general observations and related recommendations as well as concluding observations complete the main body of the report. Appendices include a list of program activities and program evaluation materials. (DB)

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Personnel Preparation To Improve Services for Children with High Incidence Disabilities

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COVER SHEET

OMB No. 1880-0538
Exp. Date: 10/31/99

U. S. Department of Education
GRANT PERFORMANCE REPORT

1. PR/Award No. (e.g., H185A200211-95)

H325H980104-99

See Block 4 on your last Notification of Grant Award

2. Recipient Name and Address

Louisiana State University - Shreveport
College of Education
One University Place
Shreveport, LA 71115

Unless address has changed, repeat from Block 1 on your last Notification of Grant Award.

3. Project Title:

Personnel Preparation to Improve Services for Children with High Incidence Disabilities

This should be identical to the title of the approved application.

4. Contact Person:

Name: Gary S. Rush
Title: Dean- College of Education
Telephone Number: (318) 797-4279
Fax Number: (318) 798-4105
E-mail Address: grush@pilot.lsus.edu

Provide the name and title of the project director or other individual who is most familiar with the content of the performance report. Also include telephone and fax numbers and E-mail address.

5. Performance Reporting Period.

April 30, 1999 to February 17, 2000

This is the time-frame for information requested in Parts III, IV and V on project status and supplementary information/ changes. (See instructions for details.)

6. Current Budget Period:

September 1, 1999 to August 31, 2000

See Block 5 of your last Notification of Grant Award.

Authorized Representative:

Name: (Typed or printed) Gary S. Rush
Title: Project Director
Signature: Gary S. Rush
Date: March 9, 2000

ED Form 524-B

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II. Project Summary

This project is designed to address the need for qualified personnel to serve children with high-incidence disabilities within the identified service area by providing stipends and other support services to students choosing special education careers. Program participants are selected on the basis of career choice. Selection procedures also take into account such factors as financial need, special needs, merit, and membership in under-represented groups.

The project focuses on expanding and enhancing training for special education at LSU-Shreveport, the only public comprehensive university in Northwest Louisiana. The location is an under served area with a high poverty level, thus service to disadvantaged populations is an integral part of the overall project.

III. Project Status

Performance Objectives(pp. 24-25)

The project objectives as described in the original proposal are being addressed. However, it had became apparent that there existed a need for further development of the initial performance base through recruitment and public awareness efforts. In the initial report, twenty-two public high schools within the target area were visited and five presentations were made with forty-seven (47) students attending. Since the last reporting period, visitations have continued in the target area and presentations were made in five schools and an additional presentation was made to three special education aides at one of the high schools. Thirty-seven students attended the five sessions. In the previous interim report the targeted twenty-five (25) participants was not reached due to the late start of the program but it was anticipated that there would be no difficulty reaching the targeted twenty-five students. During this reporting period there have been a total of seventy-seven (77) participants. Thirty-five of them are undergraduates and forty-two(42) are either Alternative Certification students (20) and the remaining twenty-two (22) are post-baccalaureate students. It appears that the need anticipated in the proposal does in-fact exist and students are responding drawing interested students from high school and college. Individuals from the world of work are also responding especially through the Alternative Certification Program. Ten (10) of the participants have dropped out of the program, nine (9) of those dropped because they failed to maintain the required G.P.A. and one (1) participant left the state. Three (3) of them were undergraduates, one (1) was in the Alternative Certification program and five (5) were post-baccalaureate. Additionally, three (3) undergraduate students graduated from the program and are gainfully employed in their field. Currently, there are three (3) students who are expected to graduate this Spring semester.

While recruiting efforts continue, the program has provided support for students. Workshops have been provided for their benefit in the areas of financial aid, health and wellness, career awareness, and counseling services and educational enhancement.

Objective 1. To enhance optimal vocational potential by improving academic performance.

This goal is being met in a number of ways. Records of project participants are evaluated and an assessment profile is produced and kept on file in the Project Coordinator's Office. Project participants are offered tutorial/mentoring services, academic planning and advising

sessions and access to computer labs enhanced with assistive technology as needed. All project participants have and must maintain an overall G.P.A. of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale.

Objective 2. To enable special education students to better manage their lives and careers.

As project activities mature, participants will be provided access to life-enhancing activities such as wellness programs, counseling sessions and training in practical life-management skills. Project faculty and staff are available on a daily basis for consultation and advisement. In interviews and questionnaires, respondents were complimentary of the support provided by faculty and staff. Four workshops have been conducted for participants addressing these topics.

Objective 3. To provide career information and advisement to special education students.

Career information workshops, publication of available positions, self-directed searches, profile consultations, and participant tours of employment sites are all activities which serve to make students aware of career opportunities and to better assess and utilize their own strengths in the job market. This phase of the project began at the end of summer session.

Objective 4. To provide financial assistance.

Financial assistance has been provided to thirty-five (35) qualified undergraduates and forty-two (42) post-baccalaureate students seeking certification in special education. All students completed the Federal Student Assistance packet to validate need for funding. Twenty-three (23) of these teachers are expected to receive certification in special education this summer. Much of the evaluation design during this period has concentrated on the alternative certification students. A description of this program follows:

Alternative Certification Academy

The Alternative Certification Academy (ACA) concentrates on special education certification for twenty-five degreed individuals who are presently teaching without certification. Four men and twenty-one women comprise the group. Sixteen are from Caddo Parish, five from Bossier Parish, and two each from DeSoto and Red River Parishes. The average participant has taught an average of 2-3 years though the range is from zero to six years (Table 1). Previous work experience ranged from an attorney and a legal aide, to teachers, to a nursing home employee.

Table 1

Frequency Distribution by Age of Participants

Age Range	% of Participants
20-25	12%
26-30	32%
31-35	12%
36-40	20%
41-45	12%
46-50	4%
50+	8%

As one can see, this is a very diverse group which could make a compressed thirteen month project very challenging; redundant for those with a number of academic courses already taken for certification or difficult to assimilate by those who have no background in education.

PROJECT DESIGN

The College of Education at Louisiana State University in Shreveport (LSUS) developed a project intended to assist 25 alternative certification students in special education to be able to complete all requirements for certification in approximately 13 months during the 1999-2000 academic year. The project works with local school districts to identify candidates and to place them for employment while completing the program. The program includes full-time attendance at LSUS during July and early August, 1999. The participant then teaches full-time during the 1999-2000 school year with special supervision by school district and university personnel. Courses are taken once per week during the fall and spring semesters during the evening hours.

During the Christmas-New Year vacation, students will attend a five day intensive session. The months of June through early August, 2000 will complete the required course work. Each student will be expected to complete the entire process in order to be recommended for certification regardless of course work already taken, since the proposed work is modular and does not fit current university or state certification course descriptions (see Appendix A for more specific information about course offerings). A professional portfolio process will be utilized to assure that appropriate skills are developed.

SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Louisiana State University at Shreveport has an ongoing, cooperative relationship with surrounding parish school systems. This project takes advantage of that relationship by working with local school systems in finding participants who meet the requirements. Admission requirements for participants include the following:

*G.P.A. average of 2.75 on a four point scale from a regionally accredited university.

*Passing score on General Knowledge and Communication Skills of the NTE.

*Approval by the Project Advisory Committee and the University's Teacher Education Program Admission and Retention Committee.

*Completion of all admission materials required for LSUS students and the project.

*In cases where the student has not completed College Algebra, a college level writing course, or a science laboratory class, the advisory committee works with the student to assure that he or she has compensating strengths.

The university has developed an agreement with students outlining financial expectations and agreement to a plan of re-payment in case they do not complete the program.

PROJECT GOALS

Goals for the University

- Develop an Alternative Certification Program for Elementary/Special Education that can be delivered in thirteen months.
- Develop modular system of delivery for needed knowledge and skills within a 40 semester hour block.
- Recruit 25 students for the alternative program.
- Assist participants to complete the program by the beginning of the 00-01 school year.
- Develop an advisory team from the K-12 sector and higher education.
- Seek to determine the type of student seeking alternative certification who is likely to be successful in the elementary/special education classroom.

Goals for the Student

- Complete all course requirements with a co-hort maximum of 25 students.
- Pass all tests required for Louisiana certification in elementary and special education.
- Develop a high quality professional portfolio.
- Develop collaborative skills with other participants and faculty.
- Use technology as a major tool in teaching and learning.

Goals for the School Districts

- Identify and recommend prospective participants for the ACA.
- Assist LSUS to identify teachers to serve as mentors for participants.
- Assist with data collection and follow-up.

These goals are based on the concept that teachers can implement constructive teaching if theory and application are continual throughout the program. Co-hort matriculation will create conditions for long-term collaboration among teachers and establish a base of support with their mentors and college instructors.

EVALUATION DESIGN

Plan for Assessment of Results

Assessment procedures were developed in cooperation with faculty, the outside evaluator, and project director. A formative evaluation procedure was developed which serves as a part of the mentor/college supervisor work with the student. It is also a portion of overall course work evaluation. Summative evaluation was developed to determine success on the six goals for the university, five goals for the student, and three goals for the school district.

The evaluation plan takes into account the need for formative evaluation conducted at regular intervals and summative evaluation conducted at the end of the project. Included are longitudinal measures tracking students as individuals as well as in groups with systematic input of data at specific intervals that will allow formative evaluation of specific components and the progress of individual students at specific time intervals. At the end of the project, summative data in terms of goals and objectives and end results will measure overall project success.

Qualitative measures will include narrative descriptions of activities and outcomes as well as regular monitoring that will allow, when necessary, modification of activities procedures and project delivery mechanisms. Evaluation of the qualitative aspects include: student evaluations of experiences and training opportunities, assessment of faculty/staff performance, including impact on students and suggestions for improvement. Evaluation of qualitative aspects

also includes faculty evaluations of students and the program's impact, partner organization evaluations, and administrative evaluation of procedures and processes.

Quantitative measures of program success will include data of the student participants (e.g. grade point average, attendance, retention, completion rates, and longer term tracking of participants' career success), and student and employer ratings of the program on questionnaires.

Evaluation results are being used in planning sessions conducted at the end of each semester and conclusion of the grant. The evaluator conducts these sessions for the purpose of assessing program strengths and weaknesses, areas for improvement and expansion needed for additions to the program, and activity/budget planning to assure continuation. Outcomes from these sessions will be used to assure overall project effectiveness, relevance, and continuation as well as accountability.

To date, questionnaires have been developed and administered to students assessing each module. An interview protocol has been developed as well as a focus group protocol (see Appendix B). Questionnaires for faculty and principals of schools where participants teach are being developed and will be finished by late December, 1999. Student questionnaires were administered at the conclusion of both the 1999 summer session and fall session. A random sample of 10 participants was utilized to conduct individual interviews at the conclusion of the summer session and of the fall session. Interview results will be discussed in the next section of the report.

RESULTS

Summer Session

Toward the end of the summer session 10 students were randomly chosen to be interviewed concerning their assessment of the project, with 9 being interviewed. Interviews were scheduled twenty-five minutes apart and so long as the interviews adhered to the protocol, that was sufficient time to cover the basic questions of those interviewed.

The interview also provided some demographic information. Some demographics were taken from the interviews, while most came from a personal data sheet completed at the beginning of the program (see Appendix B). Some of the results of that review are discussed in the first section of the report.

Clearly, this is a very diverse group. The age of the participants range from the early twenties to the mid-fifties; the students see that as a strength.

During the interview, five stated they had seen articles in the newspaper or a brochure posted either at their school or at LSUS that informed them of the opportunity of the project. Three had received information from someone at their school or in their school system and several were encouraged by someone from the school or school system.

When asked if they felt the summer modules had addressed their needs, responses were generally positive. Six of the nine were complimentary of the modules and several followed their remarks with an indication that one module was redundant, or they needed less theory and more practical teaching strategies. These remarks generally came from the teachers who had already aggregated a number of hours credit and saw in the package of the academic work too much replication. One individual felt that 8-5 daily was excessive and the pace was too challenging.

All felt the instructors were knowledgeable but several felt that there was too much redundancy. Five respondents felt both instructors were excellent. Another said they made a good team with one being somewhat "laid back" while the other was more specific and focused.

When asked about the quality of the material they received from the professors, most responded quite positively. A few felt they were given too much material while others found the handouts to be very useful. Most of them, however, felt that there was too much busy work. They seemed to understand that the content of the modules was compressed to cover a great deal of content in a short period of time but this awareness made "busy work" difficult to understand. Either the instructors were not making the purpose of the project clear to the students, or the students did not feel the purpose was as important as perhaps some other things.

Important outcomes of the summer session included:

a) Getting to know the other participants

b) Hearing different opinions on various issues

c) Use of computer lab

d) Behavioral management plan

e) Value of various teaching styles.

While most of the outcomes listed above had multiple responses, the most frequent responses were "a" and "b"; the bonding of the group and hearing other opinions and viewpoints on issues were rated as positive by the group.

Participants had some suggestions in the event this project is replicated for 2000-2001. During the summer session, they felt that full-time students taking three courses back-to-back is a long time and is very tiring. They said that two classes in the morning and one in the afternoon would be better. Several others felt that computers should be incorporated into the curriculum

not only as a skill but also how to use them more proficiently to enhance learning. Some stated that there were too many projects due at the same time which caused rushed work that compromised their ability to do their best. Again, some felt project work was "busy work" and obviously didn't appreciate the reason for the activity.

Many of the special education participants wanted more specifics in methods to teach special needs students and felt that elementary education topics were a waste of time. Conversely, some of those seeking certification specifically for elementary education felt that the special education topics were a waste of time. Much needs to be done to help these students know the necessity of instruction in both since they are to be certified in both.

Another student suggested that future project work should be assessed by "pass" or "no credit" rather than by a letter grade. One particularly sensitive issue with a few students was the attitude of the program toward them as students. Each had a degree and felt that many of the projects were designed to teach skills they learned as undergraduates. They felt they should be treated more like graduate students. One might assume this is an issue of vanity but it is more likely to relate to the comments about busy work.

A number of students were concerned that instructors were requiring multiple text books for their courses and then not using all of them. They felt some consideration should be given to having the projects buy the book to be used by each co-hort. Then, if participants wanted to keep the book(s), they could purchase them!

From a grant provided by the U.S. Office of Education, nineteen of the participants receive $500 each semester for the purposes of paying fees and purchasing books/materials.

Responses to the questions reflected that many were appreciative of the opportunity to participate and, therefore, criticisms and suggestions for improvement should be considered constructive. Most of the problems students identified were a result of the compression of "courses" so certification could result in thirteen months. It should be made clear to participants that alternative certification programs are generally a compromise to regular certification procedures and, if they wish more training, opportunities are available that they can pursue on their own to add more depth to their learning. Great care should be taken in designing the curriculum so that the most important issues are addressed. While there was group input into some of the curriculum, perhaps a group of participants, professors, and mentors could collectively design a syllabus for each module.

SUMMER AND FALL SURVEYS

Toward the end of the summer session and after the participant interview, a questionnaire was developed and administered to the participants. Two were absent and therefore the responses are from 23 participants (see Appendix B). Its purpose is to assess the courses they have taken during that session. During the summer session students took Education 250, Education 490, and Psychology 206.

The questionnaire uses a 5 point Likert Scale to assess the following:

a) The relevancy of the topics addressed

b) The balance between theory and practice

c) Instructors':

preparedness

relationship with the class

understanding of the students

methods of instruction

knowledge of the subject matter

d) The quality, quantity, and usefulness of the materials provided and the quality of the textbook utilized.

The questionnaire was developed by the external evaluator, the Dean, the College, and the Director of the Project and then reviewed with the instructors for possible modification. The questionnaire was administered at the last class session for the summer to anonymous respondents. To lessen the issue of personnel evaluation, the courses are assessed as a group, though many singled out specific courses to praise or critique. A compilation of the data can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Individual Course Assessment Form

Frequency and Percent of Responses

Summer Session

Ed. 250, Ed. 490, Psyc. 206

	Most negative 1	2	3	4	Most positive 5	Mean Response
I. Content of subject matter						
Relevancy of topics	0(0%)	1(4%)	2(8%)	15(60%)	7(28%)	4.12
Balance between theory & practice	1(4%)	1(4%)	6(24%)	11(44%)	6(24%)	4.00
II Instructors						
Preparedness of the instructors	0	0	4(17%)	9(37%)	11(46%)	4.29
Instructors' relationship with students	0	0	6(25%)	13(54%)	5(21%)	3.96
Instructors' understanding of the students	0	2(8%)	6(25%)	12(50%)	4(17%)	3.75
Methods of instruction employed by the instructors		0	1(4%)	6(25%)	13(54%) 4(17%)	3.83
Knowledge of the instructors of the subjects presented	0	0	3(12%)	7(29%)	14(58%)	4.46
III Materials provided						
The quantity of materials provided	1(4%)	3(12%)	2(8%)	8(33%)	10(42%)	3.96
The quality of materials provided	1(4%)	1(4%)	3(12%)	11(44%)	9(36%)	4.04
The usefulness of the materials provided	1(4%)	1(4%)	4(16%)	11(44%)	8(32%)	3.56
The quality of the textbooks	1(4%)	5(20%)	6(24%)	8(32%)	5(20%)	3.44

Table 2 shows that the average rating for the assessment of knowledge of the subject matter demonstrated by instructors was 4.46 on a 5 point scale. The second highest rating (4.29) was for preparedness of the instructors; the third highest (4.12) was relevance of the topics addressed. Lowest ratings were: quality of textbooks (3.44); the usefulness of materials provided (3.56); and the instructors' understanding of the students (3.75). It should be pointed out that no mean response was below 3.44, indicating that the responses were neutral or better. The quality of textbooks and materials had the most negative responses but those negative responses (ratings of 1 or 2) were given by from one to five of the 23 participants. Generally these participants were negative on other items as well except for assessment of the instructors.

Two participants felt that the instructors did not understand them and rated that item a "2" on the Likert scale. The only other negative response in that section of the survey was a "2" rating on the methods employed by the instructors. The respondent giving this rating was also one of the two already mentioned. Their responses were generally lower than other respondents indicating a general negative tone on their part reflecting that perhaps there was some resentment that they would need anything but their undergraduate degree to teach. One stated in the interview that they considered themselves graduate students and perfectly adequate to teach without this experience.

The quality of the materials provided received several negative ratings but overall scored high in the mean rating (4.04). It should be remembered that a five point scale was used and a rating of 1 or 2 is considered negative and a rating of 4 or 5 is considered positive.

During the 1999 summer session, it seems that participants felt the content addressed was appropriate and "on-target" (4.12). In the comment section, they felt also there was a good balance between theory and practice (4.00). During the interviews, participants stated that they felt one instructor was more prone to emphasize theory and the other practice. When asked if there were topics that were not useful to them, many said there was too much busy work or activities that had no relevance to the classroom. Elementary majors felt that much of the special education information was not relevant to them, another considered the APA activity not useful, and another wondered about the relevance of studying medical vocabulary.

They were asked to identify topics not addressed that they felt should have been covered. Many wanted specific instruction such as making lesson plans, while several others wanted help in developing IEP's. Two others wanted creative strategies in teaching while four wanted more knowledge about special needs children. Four others wanted more technology. Individuals mentioned classroom management and philosophical differences between resource rooms and self-contained classrooms.

As stated previously, summer modules were arranged back-to-back and there were several hours of continuous class time in the afternoon. In the interview and on the survey, many participants suggested an arrangement of modules during morning and afternoon sessions. Also, some felt the need for more applicable material.

The ratings and comments about instructors were generally positive. They felt their professors were knowledgeable and were prepared for class. The methods employed in teaching (3.83) and the instructors' relationship with students (3.96) scored in an intermediate range. The teachers' understanding of the student received the lowest rating (3.75). Much of the information received with less positive response had to do with what they felt was an inordinate

amount of take-home work and project work.

Several said they felt their instructors did not seem to realize that they had full-time jobs and a family in addition to school responsibilities. They felt that perhaps instructors didn't have a good sense of how much stress that placed upon them. The comment section at the end of the instruction section was not frequently used but the comments generally reflected an intelligent competent staff. The only other comment had to do with one instructor's lack of understanding of the pressure they were under.

The third section of the summer survey was an assessment of the materials they received from their instructors. They felt the quality of the materials (4.04) was good and the quantity also was good (3.96). However, several rated the usefulness (3.56) in the neutral range.

In the interview, several students felt there was too much to read and were therefore not certain of the usefulness of the materials. The students rating of the textbooks received the lowest mean rating on the survey (3.44). Three textbooks were required and apparently only one was utilized. Students felt that as expensive as textbooks were, either there should be a good reason for purchasing them or perhaps the project could buy the books out of project funds. In discussing this with project officials it was discovered that nineteen of the participants received five hundred dollars per semester to buy books and pay fees and their travel expenses. It should also be pointed out that the quality of materials, which should reflect relevancy, had a mean rating of over "4." Some comments made on the questionnaire regarding materials included:

Too much material was not relevant.

Textbooks were purchased and not used.

It is apparent that some students who received the $500 do not wish to spend it on the stated purpose but consider it a payment to participants. It is also apparent that a number of

students do not see the relevance of the activities. Project leaders should reconsider their relevance and inform the class of the purpose of the project and/or activity.

Table 3 contains data from the administration of the fall questionnaire which assesses Education 317 and the mentorship phase of the project. Education 317 utilized the same Likert scale questions and open-ended questions found in the summer questionnaire. A section of the questionnaire was added because it was felt that the mentorship activities were very different from the class activities and needed a different measuring instrument. Only the Likert ratings are found in these sections.

Table 3

Individual Course Assessment Form

Frequency and Percent of Responses

Fall Session

Ed. 317 and Mentorship Program

	Most negative 1	2	3	4	Most positive 5	Mean Response
I. Content of subject matter						
Relevancy of topics	0	1(4%)	2(8%)	15(60%)	7(28%)	3.92
Balance between theory & practice	1(4%)	3(12%)	11(44%)	6(24%)	4(16%)	3.36
II Instructors						
Preparedness of the instructors	1(4%)	1(4%)	4(16%)	7(29%)	11(46%)	4.08
Instructors' relationship with students	0	4(16%)	8(33%)	7(29%)	5(21%)	3.54
Instructors' understanding of the students	0	7(30%)	8(35%)	5(22%)	3(13%)	3.17
Methods of instruction employed by the instructors		1(4%)	2(9%)	9(39%)	10(43%) 1(4%)	3.30
Knowledge of the instructors of the subjects presented	0	0	1(4%)	6(25%)	17(71%)	4.67
III Materials provided						
The quantity of materials provided	2(8%)	2(8%)	3(12%)	9(36%)	9(36%)	3.84
The quality of materials provided	0	1(4%)	7(29%)	10(42%)	6(25%)	3.88
The usefulness of the materials provided	0	0	8(32%)	13(53%)	4(16%)	3.89
The quality of the textbooks	0	3(12%)	10(42%)	9(37%)	2(8%)	2.42

In examining the fall survey the top three ratings were the same as the summer survey: knowledge of instructors, preparedness of the instructor, and relevancy of topics. The quality of the material had the same rating as relevancy of topics on the fall questionnaire. Two of the lowest ratings in the summer session are repeated in the fall:

The quality of the textbooks (2.42, the only mean rating below 3 on the survey).

The instructors' understanding of the students (3.17).

The methods of instruction employed by the teacher replaced the usefulness of the materials as weak in the fall. Apparently, participants found the material more relevant in the fall semester. In general, mean responses in the fall were lower than those of the summer.

The highest rated item on the survey was the knowledge of the instructors (4.67), one of two ratings above 4.00 on this survey. The relevancy of the topics addressed (3.92) was considered to be adequate along with the balance between theory and practice (3.36). Both ratings are significantly lower than ratings of the same items in the summer. All items in that section received lower ratings in the fall than the summer.

Items in the instructor section of the survey also received lower ratings except the item measuring the knowledge of the instructor which was higher in the fall than the summer. In all other areas of assessment of the instructors, fall ratings were significantly lower. It is possible that the assessment of the instructors is real and valid or it may be due to a more critical view of their experiences. Attitudes about busy work, textbooks, and too much work may impact the whole project. A challenging program requiring great effort has a tendency to bond a group together. While that magnifies the successes, it also magnifies what they perceive as obstacles.

Likewise, in the section dealing with materials, fall ratings were lower than summer ratings except in the usefulness of the materials. The quality of the textbooks was rated much

lower, 3.44 in the summer and 2.42 in the fall.

In the fall survey, comments regarding the content included many of the same items mentioned in the summer. More specific comments about what topics they felt were not useful included (the number in parentheses is the frequency): insufficient depth to the topics (1). Six people stated that all the information was useful to them.

Topics the students wish to have addressed included: more practical strategies for special needs students (2), reading assessment techniques (1), teaching in the inclusion setting (2), more technology (4), writing and assessing writing (1), assessment and evaluation (1), and diagnostic techniques under the general comment section (1).

One participant felt that she would have benefitted more from the summer modules if she had the methods courses first. She suggested taking the fall modules in the summer and summer modules in the fall. One felt that it was good to have instructors who had been in the classroom. Others stated: too much busy work (7), courses are too compressed (4), and several felt that more practical work was needed (1).

Under section II of the questionnaire which addresses the instructor, the following comments were offered: teach fewer topics in greater depth (1), limit the number of projects (4), instructors know their subjects but maybe not their students (1), and instructors are teaching us like we are undergraduates. Some expressed the opinion that "we all have degrees and we all teach; stop treating us like we don't already have skills."

In the section assessing materials the following comments were given: needed more time to go over and discuss the material (3); too much of the materials were busy work (2); textbook was good but not discussed enough (1); too many textbooks, give practical materials how to teach reading (2); and teach the "meat" of the course (1).

As the fall and spring semester have an internship component, a section has been added to the survey. Two yes or no questions begin the questionnaire (See Appendix B). Following these two questions, three open-ended questions asked to identify greatest benefits and greatest obstacles as well as suggestions for change to improve the program. When asked if their mentors were well chosen, 21 of 25 respondents said yes (84%). However, when asked if the mentors were well prepared for their activities, 33% said no and 67% said yes.

Identified benefits of mentors included:

Having someone available for questions and concerns (4), good for someone to show you what you are doing well and what needs to be improved (15), learning from the experience of the mentor (3), examining lesson plans (1), and learning about compliance to the standards (1). While most felt the mentor activities to be on target, they said that improvement can be made in the program.

The second question asked ACA students to identify obstacles to the mentor activities. Responses to obstacles to effective mentorship included the following: a) insufficient feedback from the mentor (5); b) insufficient time for counseling(1); c) mentors that did not have background in my field -special education (3); d) because the mentor was not housed at the interns' school they were not readily available (2); e) criticism that was not constructive (1); f) tension due to the observation (1); g) mentors at times come without making prior arrangements (1); h) mentors do not seem to have a good understanding of what they are to do (1); i) scheduling observations (1); j) too many observations (4). Respondents suggested changes such as having fewer observations and more follow-up (10). Instead of requiring 10 observations per semester, consider 5 observations and 5 follow-up sessions per semester. They also felt that a pre-observation interview so that the mentor knows what the teacher is trying to

do would be helpful (4). Two felt the mentor should have experience in their fields so they could be more helpful. Several said they would like to observe their mentors' class (2).

FOCUS GROUP

A focus group was held forty-five minutes prior to the final November class session. All participants were invited; seventeen of the 25 participants attended. After orientation by the project evaluator as to the focus group purpose, participants were asked to offer suggestions for the improvement of the ACA. Immediately several participants said emphatically that ten observations per semester were too much and that more feedback from the visitation was needed. After some discussion they decided that five observations and five feedback sessions would be better and address two problems at once. They were generally pleased with their mentors and felt that they were competent and well prepared, though several were very negative about their mentors.

One individual said that personality conflict between mentors and interns was destructive and that great care should be taken in pairing interns and mentors. They also felt that it was helpful for the mentor to have experience in the intern's field so that the help they offered would be more beneficial. Also, it appears that one of the reasons participants in the fall semester were so critical of the textbooks was that the textbook was a ninth edition and the supplementary materials, including the test, were another edition, causing much confusion.

Also, they wished for the summer, 2000 session to begin on June 1st and that spring semester evening classes begin at 4:00 and end at 7:30 to allow them to get home to their families earlier. With travel time, this creates a fifteen hour day for many. At the same time, however, after observing a class, this observer noted that four or five participants driving the

greater distances arrived almost as the class began.

Concern over "busy work" was a hot topic. It became obvious very quickly that many of the participants did not recognize the relevance of some of the projects that took a great deal of time. Several were almost angry that there was so much to do in a short period of time and that there was no time to waste on activities where they could see no relevance. Also, it is apparent that an activity that one participant finds useless another finds quite beneficial. Portfolio training should begin at the very first of the course; they felt that much portfolio information was lost for lack of awareness.

Regarding mentors, participants felt they should be at the same school for the mentors to be more available. Some mentors apparently need positive support skills, though this comment came from two interns that were not happy with their mentors. They (mentors) need more time for follow-up and pre-observation sessions.

The issue of textbooks arose though nothing in addition to what was revealed in interviews or the questionnaires was stated except the comment mentioned earlier in this session.

All felt that they needed more on technology. They felt good about one week of training in technology in the summer but they feel much more is needed.

Mostly they felt the topics were too compressed and some had lost their logic. This could be the source problem of the busy work dilemma. If the logic of the course is clear, it is easier for the bits and pieces which help the activities and topics to fit together. The rush to cover more creates pressure for the instructor and the participants. Perhaps the solution to this problem is to reduce the topics but to cover them in greater depth, as suggested by some of the participants. Perhaps the primary task of this project should be to uncover rather than cover.

OBSERVATIONS AND TENTATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations should be considered tentative because the project is at its mid-point and some of the concerns voiced will be addressed in the spring and summer sessions. The group is not shy or subdued and, therefore, the Director and the Dean have already heard some of these concerns and have addressed them. A number of "fine tune" modifications have already been implemented. Because of a secure group of participants and a receptive Director and Dean, needed changes take place when possible. At least one recommendation will accompany each observation. They are as follows:

1) There were concerns voiced over the rush of registration and several said that they were unaware of the procedure and amount of fees expected of them. Start pre-registration earlier with registration packets. Perhaps students could register at an orientation session as a group.

2) During the interviews and focus groups, several malcontents emerged from the group. They were extremely negative about almost every issue and influenced a number of the participants. Mentor reports show that these individuals are good, effective teachers but their attitudes impact the success of the program.

3) Great care should be taken in the selection of participants and positive attitude should be an important attribute to seek. Perhaps an attribute checklist could be developed and a recruiting campaign could be developed to reach out to the community through civic groups, professional associations, and community centers. The newspaper articles telling the public of the program was apparently successful as four of the nine participants interviewed during the summer session read about the program in the newspaper. Perhaps this could be expanded. Applicants who look promising yet have no teaching position could find placement in the

cooperating systems. It appears that some of that was done this year.

4) While the objective assessment of the balance of theory and practice was positive, there were many in the interview and the focus group that felt they needed more specific strategies in their particular school assignment; include in the curriculum unique strategies aimed at various special education categories (or elementary education). One part of that curriculum could be visitation to carefully chosen classrooms for full days twice per semester if funds for substitutes can be found. Visitation sites should be selected by the school system and the University working cooperatively. Visitation should be scheduled early in the first semester for new teachers.

5) With some of the participants, it appears that time for bonding between instructor and student is limited. This results in a lack of good communication such as the purpose of an activity or why certain topics are not included in the course. In the project proposal, there are four or five social activities mentioned to address this issue. Reconsider the nature and timing of some of these. Some form of casual interaction between faculty and students is desirable. Mentors should also be included because a similar problem exists with a few of the interns.

6) The 1999 summer sessions were particularly difficult because the three modules were taught consecutively in the afternoon. It would be beneficial to teach two of the courses in the morning and the third beginning in the early afternoon.

7) Responses to the one week of instruction on technology was positive. Apparently the accent of the instruction was the use of the hardware and accessing information. The participants want more of that as well as how to integrate technology into the curriculum. The instructor could identify participants who are technology wise and utilize them as instructors during the period when technology is the focus. Participants generally feel this is a higher

priority than some of the other things and consideration should be given in providing more opportunities for them to learn.

8) It is apparent that those receiving funding from the special education grant consider the $500 per semester they receive to be a stipend and not to pay for fees and books. The six students not receiving a stipend seem to understand this but there is still some anxiety about the situation. When the support ($500) is provided, a list should be provided with an estimate of expenses (e.g. fees and books) to be paid from the support. Perhaps this will make it clearer as to the purpose of the supplement. Also, the project leadership may find a source of monies to pay for the non-special education participants. This should not be another factor that separates special education from "regular" education.

9) Students see the curriculum as it is implemented as disjointed. One student said that the course was so compressed it had lost its logic. The curriculum should be reexamined to prioritize concepts within a course. The sequence of the course should be reconsidered as well. The nature and extent of the supplementary activities should also be considered. This should assure that in a compressed curriculum the most important concepts are addressed in the most efficient manner possible. A committee of instructors, participants, mentors, and administrators should be included. This could be a part of the advisory committee but at least two interns should be involved.

10) There was a great deal of dissatisfaction about the textbooks. It is suggested that project leaders meet with a group of students who don't seem to be happy with the textbooks to determine the problem. There wasn't much in the focus group about that other than the number and the conflict between the edition of the textbook and the support materials being different.

CONCLUSION

Alternative Certification Academy

There appears to be a lot of negative in this section of the report. However, each participant said it was a good program and offered them an excellent opportunity for certification. In each interview and at each questionnaire administration as well as in the introduction to the focus group, the evaluator was careful to say that this was not a pass/fail assessment. It is designed to make the program better. Their response was encouraged to be frank and to the point. They reacted accordingly.

The program is in its first year and has the problems of first year programs. But the project administrators are receptive to suggestions coming from the students, instructors, and advisory committee. Given time, it will prove to be exemplary.

Undergraduate Progress

The recruiting process has yielded participants seeking certificates in special education that exceeds the goals set in the proposal. Those efforts will continue. The experience these recruits have at LSUS is very positive in regard to the background they are receiving for serving special needs children. Students seem generally content with the course work. Efforts continue in providing practicum or observation experiences early in their program. Their desire to have separate courses in special education seems to run counter to the trend in many states to integrate special education with the other foundation courses so all graduates will have a better understanding of how to teach special needs children. The practicum experience along with special "hands on" activities for those who wish to specialize with special needs children might be helpful. Some of their instructors, they felt, lacked direct experience teaching these targeted

students. Part-time students still express the need for more access to evening and summer classes.

Support for students has increased with the workshops being presented and the individual counseling being provided. Much help comes from the Director and individual instructors. More opportunities for these students with a common interest in special needs students should be provided. Additional support is being provided as student needs are identified.

IV. Budget

Budget expenditures for the period are running well under budget because of the late start of programming in the initial year of the award. Unused money from 1998-99 was rolled over to 1999-00 and was spent prior to beginning expenditure of funds for this period. Thus there is a large amount of funds remaining beyond what was expected. The extra funds will make it possible to award stipends to additional participants if we can recruit them. Project activities will include, for Summer, 2000 through June, 2001, a special project enhancement to work with alternative certification candidates seeking to be special education teachers. This project is already partially funded by the State of Louisiana and LSU-Shreveport. We plan to integrate the Special Education Improvement Services Grant into more activities of this effort. Blended funding will allow the university to assure more teachers with certification to teach special education. It is anticipated that more funds will be expended to assist in teaching skills to participants that would increase their content knowledge as well as skills in teaching. Special emphasis will be given to activities that improve skills related to passage of tests required to obtain teaching credentials in the state. All matching funds by the university are being expended at the expected level. At present we are not asking for changes in fund allocations but may need changes later in the year.

V. Supplemental Information/Changes

The project is being "fine tuned" as it develops. Other than the modification already mentioned in the body of this report, no major modifications are projected at this time.

Appendix A

Activities for Program Implementation

APPENDIX A

INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES.

The key components of the project are instructional activities that will focus on what participants will learn and be able to do. It is difficult to develop every component that the learned societies and accrediting agencies recommend and require, especially in a time compressed format. In order to make an immediate impact with the necessities for classroom success, the following activities have been implemented.

JULY - AUGUST 1999 (FIVE WEEKS) 9 hours

9 hours credit to include:

- Introduction to Special Education
- Classroom Management
- Educational Psychology
- Child Psychology
- Portfolio Development (Individual)
- Instructional Technology

FALL TERM 1999 6 hours

6 hours credit to include:

- Internship under the supervision of a college instructor and a public school teacher
- Integrate Teaching Methods for Elementary Education
  (Emphasis on reading/language arts)

INTERTERM COURSE 1999 3 hours

3 hours credit during 5 days of Thanksgiving/Christmas break to include:

- Foundations of Education
- Standards, Curriculum, Assessment

SPRING TERM 2000 9 hours

9 hours credit to include:

- Internship
- Integrated teaching methods for special education and elementary education (Emphasis on mathematics/science).
- Educational Technology

SUMMER TERM 2000 11 hours

To be delivered during June and July:

- Special Education Modules
- Integrated teaching methods for elementary/special education
  (Emphasis on social studies and children's literature)
- Methods in Health, Physical Education, Fine Arts for Children
- Work to be determined based on needs identified by participants and faculty

LATE SUMMER TERM 2000 2 hours

Completed by August 31

- Portfolio presentation to a team of peers and faculty

Credit is given for work due throughout year. TOTAL: 40 HOURS

Appendix B

Interview/Focus Group Protocol

Questionnaire for Course Evaluation

Mentorship Activities

Personal Data Sheet

Interview Protocol

Name Address Telephone List of Summer Courses

Education Background

Work Experience

How did you become involved in this project? Why?

What do you hope to learn while you are here?

Have the Summer Semester courses, have they addressed what you feel is needed?

Quality of the instructors

Adequacy of the materials received

What kind of support are you receiving?

from the grant

from Home Parish

from the University

Relevancy of the topics addressed

Adequacy of the facilities provided

List the most important outcomes of the summer semester

If the university does this again, how would you suggest they make the first summer semester more effective.

INDIVIDUAL COURSE ASSESSMENT FORM
ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION ACADEMY

Course: Ed. 317 Instructors: Bagley and Sabin
Fall Semester, 1999 August 24-November 16 4:30-8:00 Tuesdays

Rate the following aspects of the courses with "1" being the lowest rating and "5" being the highest or most positive rating. If you wish to make comments about an individual instructor or course, place those with the instructor's name or course number in the "Comments" area.

	Most negative 1	2	3	4	Most positive 5
I. Content of subject matter					
Relevancy of topics	___	___	___	___	___
Balance between theory & practice	___	___	___	___	___

List topics addressed that do not seem to be useful to you._____

_____

_____

List topics not addressed that you feel should have been included._____

_____

_____

Other comments:_____

_____

_____

II. Instructors	1	2	3	4	5
Preparedness of the instructors	___	___	___	___	___
Instructors' relationship with students	___	___	___	___	___
Instructors' understanding of the students	___	___	___	___	___
Methods of instruction employed by the instructors	___	___	___	___	___

	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of the instructors of the subjects presented	___	___	___	___	___

Comments for II: _____

_____

_____

_____

III. Materials provided	1	2	3	4	5
The quantity of materials provided	___	___	___	___	___
The quality of materials provided	___	___	___	___	___
The usefulness of the materials provided	___	___	___	___	___
The quality of the textbooks	___	___	___	___	___

Comments for III: _____

_____

_____

_____

Mentorship Activities

Do you feel your mentors were well chosen? ____Yes _____No

Do you feel your mentors were well prepared for your activities? _____Yes _____No

What do you feel were the greatest benefits of the mentor activities?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What do you consider the greatest obstacles to the mentor activities being more effective?

_____

_____

_____

_____

How would you change this part of your training to make it more effective?

_____

_____

_____

_____

NORTHWEST LOUISIANA
ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION ACADEMY

PERSONAL DATA SHEET

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

PHONE: _____

PHONE IN CASE OF EMERGENCY: _____

Assigned School for 1999-2000: _____

Parish: _____

Area Assigned to Teach:

Special Education _____ Elementary _____ Other _____ (specify)

If special education, what classification: _____

If elementary, what grade(s) or area(s): _____

For evaluation purposes of the Alternative Certification Academy, personal data will be helpful. Please complete the following data sheet to be returned on the first day of class, July 1, 1999.

Number of years of classroom teaching (if any): _____

Number of hours earned to date toward certification (if any): _____

If no classroom teaching experience, give any experience in education to date (e.g., teacher's aide, teaching in church, school volunteer, etc.) & number of years: _____

Age: 20 - 25 _____ 26 - 30 _____ 31 - 31 _____ 36 - 40 _____

41 - 45 _____ 46 - 50 _____ 50+____

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